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Taste of Place Project, Phase II: Outreach

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Taste of Place Project, Phase II: Outreach

Abstract

Information gathered in a 2005 Leopold Center-funded project about special Iowa-based foods receives wider dissemination on a web site containing facts, photos, and interviews with the food producers.

Keywords

Agritourism and place-based food, Community-based food systems, Supply networks

Disciplines

Agribusiness | Tourism and Travel



Taste of Place Project, Phase II: Outreach

Abstract: Information gathered in a 2005 Leopold Center-funded project about special Iowa-based foods receives wider dissemination on a web site containing facts, photos, and interviews with the food producers.

Question & Answer

Q: How can we publicize those unique foods that provide a “taste” of Iowa?

A: This project created a web site to encourage Iowans and non-Iowans to explore Iowa’s foods and the places that produce them. The foods and stories on the web site may encourage people to use food as a way to explore different cultures, those familiar and new ones.

Background

Place-based foods have a unique taste that often relates to an ecological niche and/or the ethnic or regional heritage of the producers. In 1992 the European Union established specific definitions for “geographical indications” or GIs, which focus on place of origin and qualities that derive from that place, e.g., climate and soil. Because geographic origin designations were developed due to particular historic and economic conditions, heritage and artisanship are implied but are *not requirements* of protected designation of origin (PDO) or protected geographical indication (PGI) criteria. They are part of the traditional specialty guaranteed (TSG) indication. These terms all have legal consequences and protections that differ from trademarks.

Categorizing American foods in those terms is difficult and perhaps irrelevant. Some foods are easy to declare place-based because they did originate here or have been grown here for decades and are tied to specific ethnic or occupational groups, processing/production methods, and eating traditions. Many foods are identified either with a specific origin or a particular heritage but not both.

During 2006 and early 2007, this project worked to establish a web presence for information obtained about unique Iowa-based foods during the earlier Leopold Center funded project, Iowa Foodways: Taste of Place. The first project identified Iowa foods that are

- Grown here, are artisan processed or prepared, and have a heritage basis;
- Artisan processed here and have a heritage basis that relates to Iowa;
- Grown and artisan processed here, but have no substantive heritage basis; and



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Budget:
\$10,000 for one year



- Grown and processed here, have a heritage basis, but are commercially produced.

The objective was to create an Iowa Place-based Food web page hosted by the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA). The site was to include fact sheets for five (later expanded to nine after further research) place-based Iowa foods for informational use by the general public, farmers, and processors as potential models for other place-based foods, and to promote the foods selected to be featured on the site.

Approach and methods

The principal investigator consulted with project advisors to craft a workable definition for place-based foods and more specific criteria for differentiating place-based foods as a distinct category. It was recommended by several sources that the European GIs be used as a starting point for categorizing those foods.

In consultation with the producers of the nine Iowa foods chosen, fact sheets accompanied by photos were prepared. Six audio interviews were linked to the newly designed web site. The site was beta-tested and previewed by DCA staff, appropriate national scholars, Leopold Center staff and consultants, as well as all interviewees.

Results and discussion

The data used for this project came from the first year's research, conducted in 2005-2006, with follow-up research taking place in 2006. Data consists of interviews with food producers, photographs of food production processes, as

well as release form transcripts, photo identification sheets, and tapes. Permission was obtained from interviewees for the use of this material.

The Iowa foods web site is found at http://www.iowaartscouncil.org/programs/folk-and-traditional-arts/place_based_foods/index.htm. The nine food stories featured on the web page describe:

1. Maytag® Blue Cheese;
2. Maasdam Sorghum;
3. Dutch letters;
4. Rhubarb and dandelion wines from the Amana Colonies;
5. K&K Tiny but Mighty Popcorn;
6. Mettwurst;
7. Black walnuts, pawpaws, and maple syrup;
8. Muscatine melons; and
9. Pork tenderloins.

Since the web pages were launched in late January 2007, they have received state and national attention. Several food scholars say they plan to use the web site as a model for projects in their states or regions. Users of the site have suggested additions to the site, interviews with additional food producers, and offered to extend more opportunities to speak with local food-based organizations.

Conclusions

The original project goal to create web-based fact sheets expanded beyond its first intentions. The process of creating and testing the site resulted in web features with appeal to farmers, business people, and cooks, as well as food writers and agribusiness organizations. The site could be expanded to include culinary tourism information and perhaps some additional stories/fact sheets. Another option would be to fund projects to create the infrastructure necessary for producers and food businesses in Iowa to work together and produce more and better Iowa place-based foods.

Impact of results

The real challenge of this project has been finding time and funds to continue the work that has been started. The major impact is that it easily can be replicated for

other states and regions. It also has provided a public venue for specific Iowa place-based foods to receive much needed attention. This can only serve to increase the value of all Iowa's local foods.

There is an opportunity for further research into potential place-based foods as well as an overall effort to link the networks of Iowa food value chains, from value-added producers, to various points of sale, as well as to restaurants, fairs and festivals.

Education and outreach

News coverage of the project's web pages appeared in the *Des Moines Register*, *Farm Bureau Family Living*, *Farm News*, *Wallace's Farmer*, and the Practical Farmers of Iowa newsletter. The Associated Press picked up the news release and at least four major Iowa television stations linked to the release on their web sites. Iowa Radio Group and WOI-Radio aired interviews with the principal investi-

gator. The Iowa State Library posts copies of all digital photos from this project on its photo archives web site.

Saltzman gave presentations on the project at Central College and to eastern Iowa Buy Fresh Buy Local members. She spoke about the results at the June 2006 Food and Society conference and the American Folklore Society conference in October 2006.

A presentation on the project can be viewed at http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/research/marketing_files/workshop06/index.htm

Leveraged funds

No additional funds were leveraged by this project, though Saltzman is following up on the results with further interviews and consultations around Iowa with regard to culinary tourism projects.

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